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SUBJECT: SSR roundtable long on particulars, short on priorities

¶1. (SBU) Summary: The Congolese government presented its priorities for reform of the military, justice and police sectors at the long-awaited but hastily-organized security sector reform (SSR) roundtable February 25-26 in Kinshasa. Officials offered a series of detailed presentations which gave donors a better sense of what the government wants to accomplish, and how much it would cost. Government representatives approached the meeting as a pledging conference rather than a roundtable discussion, and appeared to expect immediate reaction to and pledges for their proposals. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) The long-awaited Congolese SSR roundtable opened February 25 at the Grand Hotel in Kinshasa, chaired by Minister of State Mobutu Nzanga and featuring presentations by Defense Minister Chikez Diemu, Interior Minister Denis Kalume, and Justice Minister Mutombo Bakafua which laid out the government's strategic priorities for reforms in the military, police and justice sectors. Other Congolese officials presented additional details during two days of discussions at the Palais du Peuple involving experts from U.S., EU, MONUC, Belgium, Canada, France, Netherlands and the UK in sectoral commissions with Congolese counterparts.

¶3. (SBU) The defense commission heard the government's plan for military reform. Previewed by Chikez at the opening session, it includes short, middle, and long-range phases, and was accompanied by a detailed list of cost estimates. The short-term (2008-2010) priority is to develop a rapid-reaction force of 12 battalions capable of ensuring the security of the state as MONUC draws down its forces. The mid-term (2008-2015) will be dedicated to the establishment of a "covering" force which will, among other tasks, support reconstruction of civilian and military infrastructure. The final phase (2015-2020) will focus on consolidation of reforms made in the first two.

¶4. (SBU) At the police commission, government representatives similarly presented an exhaustive list of precise requirements addressing logistics, transportation, infrastructure and armaments necessary for general modernization of the Congolese police force. They also submitted requirements for more specific projects, highlighted by Kalume at the opening ceremony, including countering traffic jams and armed robbery in urban centers, and strengthening security at airports and seaports.

¶5. (SBU) The justice commission divided its work into three separate areas: improvement of the institutional and physical integrity of the judicial system; strengthening its human and financial resources; and protecting human rights and modernizing the country's corps of judicial officials through rapid recruitment and training of new magistrates and other officials.

¶6. (SBU) The final recommendations of the roundtable mirrored the sectoral discussions. It endorsed implementation of a rapid reaction force as well as the completion of feasibility studies on the military's participation in reconstruction activities. For the police, it recommended a plan of action to implement and oversee reforms suggested in commission discussions. Recruitment and training of new magistrates and other officials featured prominently in the recommendations for reform of the justice sector. An existing group co-chaired by justice ministry and EU had previously begun work to implement an action plan on judicial reform.

¶7. (SBU) Comment: Questions regarding which programs donors might be willing to fund, and how funding might be coordinated, remain unresolved. Government proposals lacked a sense of priorities and often appeared to be little more than laundry lists to which donors were expected to pledge. End comment.

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